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‘THE PROCESS IS FAR MORE COMPLICATED THAN I THOUGHT’

EXPERIENCES OF AN INNOVATIVE AND INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION⁶

Abstract

In this paper, experiences of a three-year training development project, realised in the Path of Deinstitutionalization – Urgent Moves programme, are presented. The course titled ‘Theory and Practice of Supported Living’ is the outcome of the development, which includes many innovative elements. From these, we highlight the diverse cooperation with national and international higher education and non-governmental actors, and the inclusive higher education practice, which was given an award of excellence by Tempus Public Foundation last year. Our work is innovative not only because it uses modern pedagogical tools, such as project method, cooperative learning, and the team teaching model, but also because curriculum developers at the Faculty of Special Needs Education were the first to use the inclusive methodology in higher education in Hungary.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Path of Deinstitutionalization – Urgent Moves (PODIUM) project and the curriculum development carried out in this framework form part of the inclusive practices based on the ‘Nothing about us without us’ principle, which is the basis for diverse, innovative co-operation and team-work with people with disabilities and professionals. All authors of this study had experience from previous and ongoing participatory research projects (e.g. From Equal Opportunities to Taigetus OTKA Research), which supported their participation and cooperation in this project.

The background of the project was underpinned by several influencing circumstances that had an impact on both the design of the project itself and the selection of consortium partners. The leader of the winning consortium is Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities Non-profit Ltd. (later FSZK), which in the spring of 2015 (in the project planning period) had already had the experience of the first phase of the deinstitutionalization process (transition from large institutions to community based services) implemented by the strategy[1] (implementation period 2012–2014). FSZK had previously participated in a LEONARDO Mobility Programme,

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6 The article is mainly based on the MA level thesis of Mária Losoncz. The citation details can be found in the references.

as a consortium partner, in which a comprehensive training concept was developed for the further training of deinstitutionalization (DI) managers in the field of social adult training. The professional development realised in collaboration by Czech, English and Hungarian partners served as useful input in the preparation of the professional content of the PODIUM project.

During the granted period of 2012–2014 and the process of deinstitutionalization, resources were mainly directed towards the renewal of the physical environment and the improvement of housing services. Meanwhile, a clear need for human resources development emerged, on the one hand, among regional / local / institutional managers and, on the other hand, a more coordinated planning of community services was urgent (Losoncz 2017).

The PODIUM international program was created to contribute to the realisation of Article 12 and 19 of Act XCII of 2007 about the proclamation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. With regard to the national framework, the initiative is based on the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Disability Social Inclusion Strategy (2011–2041), 2015–2020 (Bódy et al. 2015) and supports the long term realisation of the transition from large social institutions to community based services for persons with disabilities during the period of 2017–2036 [Government Decision 1023/2017 (I. 24.)]. (Cserti-Szauer–Losoncz 2017)

Partner countries and organisations participating in the project: Central Denmark Region (Denmark) (Adult Training Methodology Centre), Asociația 'Alternativa' Brâncovenesti (Romania) (CUDV Draga (Slovenia) (complex residential centre near the capital city) MDRI-Serbia (Serbia), ELTE Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education and ELTE Faculty of Social Sciences (Hungary) (higher education institution) and FSZK Nonprofit Ltd. (Hungary) (consortium leader). The European Union's Erasmus + KA2 Strategic Partnerships Support Programme is carried out between 1 September 2015 and 30 April 2018.

The training structure developed under the LEONARDO program formed the basis upon which discussion and collaboration of consortium partners were initiated. The five project partners had jointly developed a core training programme, along which the participating organisations separately developed their adult training programmes, adapted to their own country and local circumstances.

In this adaptation period, using the core training material, the Danish partner developed a 'train the trainers' programme designed to prepare trainers for their later teaching tasks during the training. During the train the trainers course, six trainers from each partner organisation were educated. The expected result of the project is that, after training and adaptation, in all partner countries 20–20 people can run a pilot course for DI managers (altogether 80 persons). In Hungary, a pilot training for 30 students of higher education is also incorporated in the core training adaptation. During the pilotage, the quality and content of the training courses are continuously evaluated (by both trainers and participants). According to the project plan, after the pilot training, 'DI managers' involved in the project must demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge by solving practical tasks and then start their activities in the process of initiation. All partners are responsible for the dissemination of the project results in their country, and trained professionals start coordinating activities in institutions that joined the DI process (Losoncz 2017).

2. THE HIGHER EDUCATION PILLAR OF THE PODIUM PROJECT

2.1. *Co-operation between faculties*

The project, launched in autumn 2015, has a specific background. It had already been submitted to Tempus Public Foundation, the national agency for Erasmus + applications in Hungary, in the previous tender cycle of spring 2014. Although professional reviewers in their evaluation acknowledged the project design and underlined how much it fitted DI strategies that had earlier begun in the region, the elaboration of a training content and its trial in higher education were declared necessary in order to guarantee long-term feasibility (with a focus on human resources) of the DI procedure. FSZK invited two faculties of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education and the Faculty of Social Sciences, to join the project.

At both faculties the focus of research has recently shifted from institutionalisation to equal access to community based living and employment services. Ágnes Lányiné Engelmayer (2002) and Péter Zászkaliczky's research on group homes (1998) are still fundamental documents of the Hungarian process of DI. Katalin Tausz (1997, 2015), György Könczei (1991, 1994) and Csaba Bánfalvy (1997, 2005) embed fundamental issues of social inclusion of people with disabilities into the context of social policy and occupational rehabilitation. Research results by Gyula Hatos (2015), Katalin Radványi, Enikő Regényi, János Csorba (2013), Eszter Márkus (2003), Anikó Sándor (2017) and Tünde Bulyáki (2016) improve the quality of life primarily of those most involved in the process, i.e. individuals with intellectual disabilities, high support needs and psychosocial disabilities (Cserti-Szauer–Losoncz 2017)

Thanks to the strong professional links of the two faculties and the traditionally good cooperation with advocacy organisations, besides the academic knowledge base, the practical experiences of these organisations as development partners are also incorporated in the course that was offered on Bachelor's level in the autumn semester of the 2017/2018 academic year. The involvement of the National Council of Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FESZT) and the Association of ÉFOÉSZ Veszprém County is an extremely credible value added during the training. (Cserti-Szauer–Losoncz 2017)

2.2. *Training development project*

Training development carried out in the framework of the PODIUM project is related to the current process of demolition of the institutional culture in Hungary and aims at strengthening the supported living service network from the perspective of training professionals.

In the framework of the PODIUM project, training developers seek to attract potential key people (Katona 2012) who may take an active part in planning and managing the life course of people with disabilities. Social workers as well as special needs teachers may be involved in the operation of supported living services.

The training development presented here responds to the ongoing process of replacing residential institutions, in the preparation of key personnel with the tools of higher education and adult education, in an international and multidisciplinary approach, in order to provide persons with disabilities access to the local community,

so that segregated services could be replaced by mainstream solutions. The development enriches the professional training repertoire of the replacement process in partner countries with higher education and adult training elements. As a result of the Erasmus + project, 80 DI managers in the partner countries and 30 higher education participants in Hungary are trained.

BA students of both special education and social work were offered participation in the pilot training, in a course titled Theory and practice of supported living. The professional content and design of the course supports the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Hungary. This is why, the following principles, together with the experience of the core training program developed by the international consortium, were focused on during the development process:

- Practice-centred approach; theoretical foundations and additional information were made available online for everyone. Expertise on decision-making is in the focus.
- Inclusive methodology is used both during the pilot training and in future courses.
- A method of project and work is implemented, which has useful end results for the communities of collaborating students and instructors.
- In order to maximize the opportunity for cooperation, the course is announced jointly by the two faculties.
- Perspectives of people with psychosocial disabilities, besides 'classic' disability areas and expertise, are articulated.
- We work in a team teaching model, we use various co-operative techniques and group work, to underline the importance of collaboration of the special educators in team work.

The course was designed by three participatory co-teachers, four experts working in the non-profit sector, and eleven colleagues of ELTE Faculty of Special Needs Education and the Faculty of Social Sciences, and it was attended by 31 students. The 20 lessons can be divided into five modules, which modules are arranged around question raising professional papers, text collections and thematic source lists, connected as follows:

- Discussion of the course methodology – Freedom of Learning
- Independent Living Movement, Self-Determination
- Human rights model and rights, empowerment
- Supported living and community-based services
- The interpretation of professional roles in Supported Living services

Joint work is supported by digital interfaces (Moodle and Facebook); professional publications related to the development can be accessed on the ELTE Digital Institutional Knowledge (EDIT) site from autumn 2017.

2.3. Inclusive focus

The inclusive seminar is an educational method related to the values of disability. This approach strengthens the participation of individuals with disabilities in discourses about them, interprets participation in new areas such as, for example, the academic world, the education of university students in higher education, and the idea that

professionals in the education of people with disabilities should never talk about them without them. The method provides opportunities for the cooperation of disabled and non-disabled teachers and train special education students together.

Inclusive seminars are carried out in cooperation by persons with disabilities who are not qualified teachers (participatory co-teachers) and non-disabled, qualified university teachers. The methodology has been tested at several courses of ELTE Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education (e.g. *Historical aspects of disability and special needs education, in upper grades Lifelong Learning and intellectual disability, Support of adults with disabilities, and 'From the cradle to the grave' – death, dying, mourning.*

Students' feedback show that these seminars are inspirational, support them in the process of professional path finding, and contribute to the selection of specialisations. Participatory co-teachers add values that nondisabled qualified trainers could not provide. The participation of individuals with disabilities guarantees that topics discussed during the course (and in the related inclusive research) are indeed relevant for the community with disabilities, which increases the validity of professional procedures.

In addition to the inclusive seminars, participatory co-teachers, as members of the training team, take part in planning the course content, prepare for the class, analyze the teaching experiences of the lessons, participate in the support of student project work and in the evaluation process.

The methodology has also been adapted to the curriculum development of the PODIUM project. The training team monitors the work with qualitative research tools (ELTE Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education website 2017).

In October 2017, the method was awarded the International Development of Higher Education prize by Tempus Public Foundation, and the inclusive work was acknowledged with the following words on the awards ceremony: 'The involvement of persons with disabilities as instructors in seminars, and their preparation for this task, present a new approach in the practice of higher education. The programme can be utilised in various ways and adapted in research areas focusing on human beings, and contributes to the sensitisation of students and instructors to the needs of persons with disabilities' (Tempus Public Foundation 2017).

3. SUMMARY

Somogyi and Tausz, in their problem raising paper about supported living, say: 'Persons' with disabilities rights to freedom and dignity can only be fully enjoyed if they are considered autonomous beings: self-determination, freedom of choice, is a prerequisite for living with dignity. In other words: depriving a person of self-determination means being deprived of human dignity' (Somogyi–Tausz 2017, p. 3). Enjoying these fundamental rights constitutes the basis for realising the right to living a self-determined life and inclusion in the community.

At the end of the previous century, Independent Living movements evolved in Hungary and began fighting for the respect of human dignity and the right to self-determination. Looking back from 2017, we are amazed by the power and tremendous work of some advocating NGOs, rehabilitation specialists and committed politicians, which resulted in the creation of one of the most important legislative milestones in Hungary, the Act No. 26 of 1998 on assuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. They also became part of the National Disability Council, created the National Disability Program and participated in the development of services and

social consultation. It is, however, still unclear where enthusiastic and committed professionals and politicians had disappeared from the sides of those fighting for people with disabilities, and without whom it was finally not possible to complete the DI program of large residential institutions until the statutory deadline (January 1st 2010). The enthusiastic professional, methodological preparatory work at the turn of the millennium, slowed down for the second half of the 2000–2010 period, and gained renewed strength after the ratification of the UN CRPD. The Deinstitutionalization Strategy (2011–2041) and the subsequent (2017–2036) refer specifically to the self-determination of people with disabilities, identifying it as a target for projects funded under operational programmes and contributing to the development of access to community services.

The answer given by higher education to the declared policy challenges on the community inclusion of people with disabilities can be placed in the matrix system of education, research, development, forming attitudes, key personnel preparation and vocational competence concepts at all levels of training.

Applying the inclusive seminar methodology is recommended in the preparatory phase of the special needs teacher training program, with focus on courses on the provision of services for disabled persons. Students who choose to study special education are most likely to have increased sensitivity, interest, and commitment to supporting individuals with disabilities, their rehabilitation, self-determination, and social inclusion. But it is easy to see that this is rather at a cognitive level. At the inclusive seminars students have an opportunity to directly experience partnership in interaction with people with disabilities, as well as in professional discussions with seminar leaders.

The training development, presented in this study, sought, both in the content and methodology, to include valid policy contents related to transformation. During the course, students elaborated topics from the full range of the topic of DI, which was presented during the project celebration. In each project students worked in close cooperation with participatory experts, and covered the following topics:

- creating supported living services for people with intellectual disabilities,
- the needs of persons with physical disabilities in the field of supported living,
- activities carried out by the group 'self-determined life – living in community',
- guardianship and supported decision-making in domestic judicial practice,
- after-care in state care for adults with special educational needs,
- how to create supported living services?

The link between practice and policy is justified by the fact that, due to the increased professional interest in the pilot training, the project day was opened by the Head of the Disability Department of the Ministry of Human Capacities. The main objective of the PODIUM project is to develop a curriculum that will help move from large residential institutions to community-based living services. While the majority of partners are directly involved, ELTE will target prospective special education and social professionals who will be potential participants in the process in the future. Our work is not only innovative because it uses modern pedagogical tools such as project method, cooperative learning, and the team teaching model, but because the curriculum developers at the Faculty of Special Needs Education were the first to use the inclusive methodology in higher education in Hungary.

The Theory and Practice of the Supported Living seminar both in its contents and in its methodology, perfectly fits the content of the special education program, the

community and values that the Faculty represents. Péter Zászkaliczky, the dean of the faculty, in his greeting on the website of the faculty, says:

'All that is, in the slogan of the faculty – With knowledge for an inclusive country' – so well described: With the professional, scientific knowledge and the know-how built on it, the members of the community of the faculty learn, teach and do research to contribute to the creation of a society that does not exclude anyone from any mainstream institution in which the information, goods and services are equally accessible, in which everyone is a part and a valuable part of the community.'

[1] Decision No 1257/2011 (VII. 21.) On the deinstitutionalization strategy for the replacement of social care facilities for persons with disabilities and government tasks related to their implementation

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